

**HON. MARCY KAPTUR
Â OF OHIO
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to pay tribute to a former Member of this body, Congressman Sonny G.V. Montgomery of Meridian, Mississippi. Our Nation laid him to rest this week in his home State.

As a Congresswoman who arrived here in the early 1980s, it was my great privilege to serve on the committee which he chaired, the Veterans' Committee, which was his life here in the Congress of the United States. I can recall so many times, as a Member of that committee, what a gracious, gracious Chair he was. Even to the new young members who had much to learn. I remember so much of what he did and the camaraderie that he established as a very precious gift not just to the committee or to the Congress but to the Nation. And we could use more of that spirit here today.

I remember in 1984 when the Montgomery G.I. Bill passed in a Democratic Congress with his leadership, how generation after generation a young veteran would come to be able to afford an education and to obtain decent health care and what he did to strengthen our Armed Forces, including our Guard and Reserve, and given us the best Armed Forces that the world has ever known. He hardly ever claimed credit for that publicly, and yet he worked on it for years.

I can remember many State of the Union addresses where in what I called the Montgomery chair back there in the back row he would sit and he would welcome the Presidents from each party as they would come into this Chamber, and I cannot ever remember Sonny Montgomery losing his temper. If he did, I certainly never saw it.

I watched him when we struggled with the issue of Agent Orange. When some of the scientists who testified before the committee said, We really cannot show causality, we cannot show that, in fact, this veteran has cancer because he was mixing Agent Orange in big vats with paddles in Vietnam back in the 1960s and early 1970s. And there came a point in the committee when Sonny said, You know, there is a time when you have to do what is morally right even though it may not be scientifically provable. And for the first time in the Nation's history since Vietnam we were able to treat veterans who contracted serious illnesses as a result of their service. Special centers were set up, such as in New York, in order that we could assess and learn about these terrible, terrible illnesses that resulted from exposure to Agent Orange.

Sonny Montgomery traveled to the districts of the Members of his committee. I was so impressed, because many times we would get a veteran who, unfortunately, because of illness would be out of control in the audience, and Sonny had a way of moving his hand and talking to the veteran, kind of calming him down. He was an amazing, amazing man to watch.

He loved veterans. He loved Americans, but he had a special gift to be able to reach those who sometimes were distant. Half of the homeless in America are veterans. The work that he did as Chair of that committee helped us to recognize for the first time the problem of homeless veterans.

He got great assistance from a young Congressman then who had joined the committee, *Lane Evans* of Illinois, who currently due to Parkinson's illness is in Illinois right now trying to heal himself. These men did so much for our Nation and for the improvement of the conditions under which our veterans serve.

I can remember when Sonny came to my district in Ohio. It didn't matter where you took him, to a Veterans Post, a Legion Post, a public meeting, people would stand and cheer. He was "Mr. Veteran" from coast to coast. And he left a legacy of improved education, of improved health care, of a veterans system that increased the number of health care clinics, both in urban and rural areas, to care for our veterans, and he took very seriously the slogan from Lincoln that is on the front of the Department of Veterans Affairs, "To care for them who shall have borne the battle, his widow or widower, and his or her orphan." He lived it.

He traveled the world. We improved cemeteries around the world for our veterans. We worked

on housing programs to go beyond the GI single-family home mortgage to multiple family home construction.

He did so much so quietly and so effectively. Personally, he worked with me many, many years as we were trying to build the World War II memorial here in Washington in three different committees of jurisdiction, and yet wasÂ that steady force that was always at our side as we worked for 17 years to move that piece of legislation from dropping it here in the hopper all the way to dedication just a few years ago here on the Nation's Mall.

His staff, Matt Fleming, Gloria Royce, so many people who served on that committee, knew that they had worked with a very great man, a man who always carried himself with great humility and great humor.

He was one of the founders of the Prayer Breakfast, the Bipartisan Prayer Breakfast here that meets every Thursday morning, and he offered the "sick and wounded report." He took an interest in every Member here, and he would know about their families and he would report to us on what was happening, and he built such a bond between people on both sides of the aisle.

I look at a certain Member whose voting record is different than mine, and I will say, how did I meet that person? My gosh, I met that person at the Prayer Breakfast with Sonny Montgomery.

He would go to the national meetings of the VFW or when the young winners would be selected from the Voice of Democracy awards at the VFW or through the American Legion and would receive standing ovations by thousands and thousands and thousands of people.

He was a two star general himself, having served in World War II, in Korea and then, of course, in the Guard, and he became a champion of the Guard and Reserve at a time when so many Americans were not really paying attention. He improved the facilities, he improved their opportunities.

So today, Mr. Speaker, in ending my remarks, I just want to say it was truly a deep, deep privilege to serve with Congressman and General Sonny G.V. Montgomery of Meridian, Mississippi. It is obvious the people of his district love